

Alabama Department of **REHABILITATION SERVICES**



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Tuesday, March 01, 2011

Contact: Kathleen McGehee 334-293-7500 or 1-800-441-7607

Brain Injury Awareness Month sheds light on life-altering event

MONTGOMERY – A routine drive to work dramatically changed Randal Sanford's life.

It was February 2007, and he was on his way to his job as an office manager when he ran into the debris of an accident between an 18-wheeler and a car. He pulled over to the side of the road and got out to examine the damage to his vehicle when an SUV flipped several times and ran into him on his left side, collapsing his lung and crushing his skull.

The accident left him as one of 5 million Americans with a traumatic brain injury, and caused vision loss in his left eye, deafness in his left ear, and a diminishment of his sense of smell.

To increase awareness of traumatic brain injury and its impact, March has been proclaimed "Brain Injury Awareness Month" in Alabama and nationwide.

In Alabama, those who have a brain injury can receive services through the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services (ADRS).

Once a person has a brain injury, care coordinators with the department work one-on-one with the individual and the family to educate them about the brain injury and what to do next.

"The more we can do for someone in the two-year window after they are injured cognitively, the better they are going to be long term," said Maria Crowley, ADRS state head injury coordinator.

In Sanford's case, that meant learning how to do some things again. Haleigh Cushen, his traumatic brain injury care coordinator, worked with him to jump-start his memory.

She recommended daily tasks for him to perform, including doing housework, getting out in the community as well as brain exercises, such as puzzles and games.

He was assigned a rehabilitation counselor, Tina Dortch, also with ADRS, who assisted him in helping in find a temporary job in the mailroom at Auburn Montgomery. He participated in an on-the-job evaluation, which allowed the school to evaluate Sanford as a potential job candidate. It also gave Sanford work experience.

The experience put Sanford in the position to obtain a part-time job on his own at the YMCA, where he assists with keeping the facility clean. ADRS provided a driver's evaluation and driver's training so that Sanford could make the two-mile drive to work. The department also purchased a special mirror so he can see multiple angles while driving.

"He's more independent," said Jolynn DeMorrow, his fiancée. "He doesn't have to depend on anyone to get to and from work."

DeMorrow said that Sanford has come a long way since his injury.

"He's further than I ever dreamed he would be," she said. "ADRS does great things."

She's glad that the month of March brings awareness to traumatic brain injury.

"It is good to let people know that there are people who have brain injuries," DeMorrow said. "And that brain injury does not mean the end of life for someone."

The Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services is the state agency whose mission is to enable Alabama's children and adults with disabilities to achieve their maximum potential.